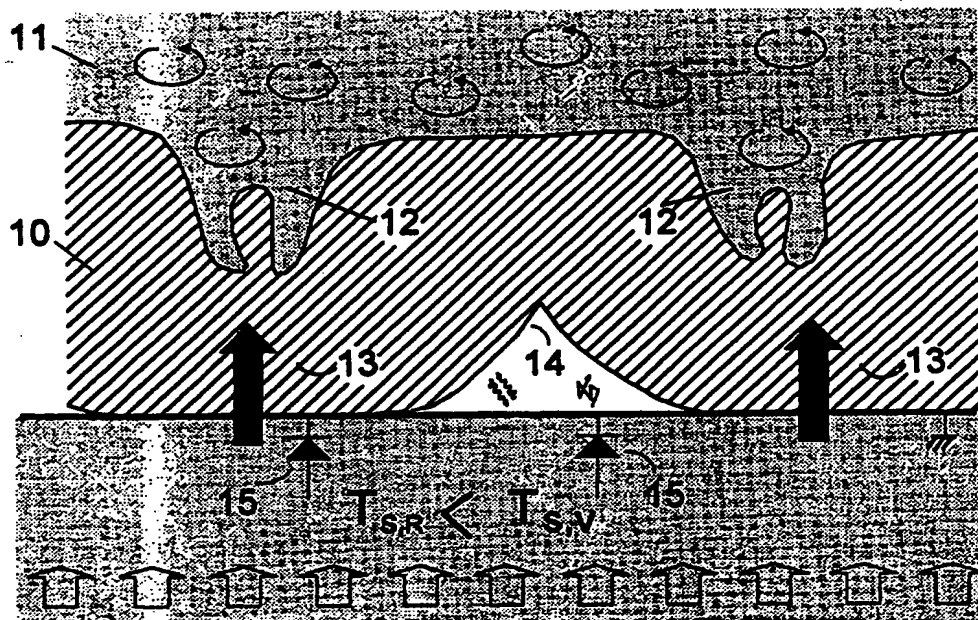




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(54) Title: FINGERPRINT SENSOR



(57) Abstract

Method and apparatus for measuring of patterns in an at least partially heat conducting surface (10), preferably a fingerprint, characterized in the heating of a plurality of sensor elements (15) being in thermal contact with a substantial part of the surface to be examined, the measuring of temperature or change in temperature in each of the sensor elements to provide a signal corresponding to the heat loss in relation to the supplied energy in each sensor element, and collocating said signal at each sensor element to provide a segmented picture based upon the difference in heat loss at the sensor elements.

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FINGERPRINT SENSOR

The invention relates to a method and an apparatus for measuring patterns in a partially heat conducting surface, preferably a fingerprint.

5 Identification by the use of fingerprints has lately come to the fore as a result of the increasing danger of the forging of credit cards, as well as the greatly increased availability of pattern recognition algorithms. Some systems for recognition of fingerprints have already been
10 made available on the market. The technique used to register the fingerprint varies.

Some of the previously known solutions are based upon optical technology using light with one or more wavelengths. These are sensitive to dirt and contamination, both in the
15 fingerprint and on the sensor surface, and thus cleaning is necessary for both.

Another alternative is pressure measurements. This, however, has the disadvantage that the sensor surface becomes sensitive to mechanical wear and damage, as the
20 sensor has to have an at least partially compliant surface.

Since this kind of sensors may be exposed to long term use in varying and sometimes demanding conditions the sensor needs to have a robust surface, to be as insensitive to pollution in the fingerprint and on the sensor as possible,
25 and to be able to be screened electrically in order to avoid interference from outside and electromagnetic discharges that can harm the electronic circuits in the sensor. It must be capable of reading most fingerprints without being disturbed by latent prints from earlier use. It must also
30 be capable of reading worn fingerprints in which the pattern is no longer visible. In some cases, e.g. in credit cards, it would also be advantageous if the sensor could be made compact.

In the view of costs there is also a demand for simplicity and minimizing of the number of parts.
35

An interesting alternative is to measure the pattern in the fingerprint using the difference in temperature between

the "valleys" and the "ridges". This, however, demands very sensitive detectors, and is also sensitive regarding variations in temperature due to different circumstances. This kind of sensors is known from Norwegian patent 153,193 and
5 US patent 4,429,413.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a sensor being easy to produce, making them cheap in production, and also having such small dimensions that they may be integrated in identification cards and credit cards or the
10 like. It is an additional object to make a sensor being as insensitive to pollution in the fingerprint and on the sensor as possible, and which may be used without maintenance for long periods of time.

According to the present invention the problems related
15 to the known solutions are solved using a method as being characterized in claim 1, and a sensor device as defined in claim 7.

The invention is related to detection of thermal structures by measuring differences in heat conductivity at
20 the surface, preferably a fingerprint, touching the sensor. This makes the measurements independent of the temperature of the surroundings.

Dirt and contamination will be less critical for the measurements of the sensor than in other, corresponding
25 methods. If a relatively smooth, thin layer of contamination is present on the sensor it will, to a certain degree, affect the contrast in the picture, but the print may still be read. Larger quantities of dirt affecting the measured heat conduction may give measuring errors.

30 The heat conductivity is measured by heating the sensor being touched by the object to be measured, and by measuring the resulting change in temperature (relative temperature) in relation to the provided energy. The better heat conductivity the measured object has, the less the local
35 change in temperature will be. The heat conductivity can be measured as a function of time, integrated over a period of time or at a chosen time after the heating is started or stopped. A plurality of measurements, or a continuous

temperature control at each measuring element, provides a possibility for calculating the heat capacity as well as providing a measurement of the heat conductivity in the measured object.

5 The heating in itself may be performed in different ways. Joint heating of the whole sensor is one possibility. To obtain a joint heating, the heat generated in other electronic circuits coupled to the sensor may be used.

10 In a preferred embodiment of the invention a separate heat source is used at each separate temperature sensor, which provides a controlled and accurate measurement in each point, so that the method and apparatus is less sensitive to local variations in temperature. This is also advantageous since the provided energy may be controlled at each
15 temperature sensor, which gives an improved control of the temperature, and since the energy sources may be positioned close to the surface and the object to be measured, and thus gives less use of energy and faster respons since the mass to be heated is closer.

20 The invention will be described in detail referring to the disclosed drawings.

Figure 1 shows a schematic cross section of the position of the sensor system.

25 Figure 2 shows a detail of the contact surface between the fingerprint and the sensor.

Figure 3 shows the same situation as figure 2, but with a worn fingerprint.

30 Figure 4 shows essentially the same as figure 2, but with a sketch of the electronic circuits connected to the sensor.

Figure 5 shows a schematic view of the temperature sensor circuit.

35 In figure 1 a schematic view of the position of the sensor in relation to the other circuits is shown. The sensor 1 is directly in contact with the fingerprint. The system circuits 4 are provided, among other things, to control and manage the collection of data from the sensor 1. Underneath the sensor 1 a layer may be provided of a thermally

insulating, or partially insulating, material 2 in order to limit the heat conduction to and from the other electronic system circuits 4. To enhance the insulation the layer may be provided with a cavity under each sensor element. If the heat from the system circuits 4 is to be used in the measurements of the heat conduction this layer may be made thinner.

Between the system circuits 4 and the insulation layer 2 a heat conducting layer 3 is shown that provides a uniform distribution of heat from the different system circuits 5 on the sensor. This way smooth and accurate measurements are secured.

The physical thickness of the sensors will vary, but when used in relation to, or mounted on, identification cards the thickness will preferably be as small as possible, preferably less than 0.5 mm comprising the system circuits 5.

The most interesting materials for use in the sensor are the following. The electronic circuits are made from semiconducting materials, preferably with well known silicon, or gallium arsenide (GaAs) technology, and electric and thermal insulation is provided by using SiO_2 or other materials permitting direct mounting of semiconducting materials. The electric conductors are preferably made from aluminum, or from gold or other materials common in relation to semiconductors. An alternative may be using polymer based semiconductors, conductors and insulating materials, which would be advantageous in relation to credit and identification cards, as they provide a large degree of pliancy and elasticity.

Figure 2 shows a detail of the contact surface between the sensor and the fingerprint in which the sensor is heated by means of a uniform heat supply indicated by arrows in the sensor. The fingerprint comprises ridges 13 with valleys 14 between them. The skin is comprised by an outer skin 10 (epidermis) with an area 11 behind it with circulation of blood (indicated by circular arrows). Underneath the ridges 13 there are papilla 12 which, among other things have blood

circulation. The ridges 13 come in contact with the sensor and are heated, and the blood circulation in the finger transports the heat away. In the valleys the surface of the sensor is cooled essentially by two mechanisms, radiation and heat conduction in the air comprised in the valley 14. These cooling mechanisms are not as efficient as the heat conduction in the ridges 13, which results in a difference between the relative temperature $T_{s,r}$ measured in the ridges 13 and the relative temperature $T_{s,v}$, which is not. These temperatures may be measured using the temperature sensors 15. Measurements from all the temperature sensors 15 are collected and, using information regarding supplied energy, a pattern is made showing the fingerprint.

The temperature at the temperature sensors 15 may be measured at one or more points of time, or continuously. Using a plurality of, or continuous, measurements a picture may be obtained showing the effective heat capacity at the different measuring points, in addition to the heat conductivity. Since the sweat ducts 8 and the surrounding skin cells 9 (sweat diffusion), which due to a high content of water have a high heat capacity, is comprised in the ridges of a fingerprint, the difference in heat capacity will enhance the ability of the sensor to distinguish the ridges from the valleys.

Because the sensors measure the temperature the output signal from one sensor is essentially inversely proportional to the heat conduction at the measured point in the fingerprint. A collocation of these signals will therefore provide a pattern indicating the distribution of heat conductivity, and thus the fingerprint.

To begin with the temperature sensor 15 will be a conventional electronic component, but it is clear that other measuring techniques, e.g. optical or acoustic, may be utilized.

The contrast in the measured fingerprint may be enhanced by increasing the supplied heat. Because of the difference in heat conductivity the areas that do not have the heat transported away will increase their temperature

faster than the other areas. This provides a direct method for increasing the contrast in the signal without the use of picture manipulation or other extensive calculations.

Figure 3 shows a corresponding situation where the ridges in the fingerprint are worn off, and thus the fingerprint is not actually visible. The difference in heat conductivity is here given by the thickness of the outer skin 10. By the previous ridges 13 an increase in heat conductivity compared to the previous valleys 14 may still be measured. This is because the distance from the sensor to the area with blood circulation, because of the papilla, is less than the distance d_v in the valley areas 14. The supplied heat in the ridge areas is thus transported more efficiently away than the supplied heat in the valley areas. Therefore this kind of fingerprints may also be registered by difference in heat conductivity, in addition to the difference in effective heat capacity.

Figure 4 shows a schematic sketch of a possible layout of the electronic circuits of the sensor. Closest to the fingerprint an electrically conducting, earthed layer 20 is drawn, made e.g. from aluminum or other conducting or semiconducting materials, to avoid electric disturbances from the surroundings and to prevent discharges from harming the sensor. This layer 20 may also comprise a layer made from a mechanically resistant material 25, e.g. SiO_2 , Si_3N_4 or $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$, to protect the sensor from mechanical stress and chemical corrosion. These layers 20, 25 should preferably be sufficiently thin as not to hinder the heat transportation to the fingerprint and affect the measurements.

Between the sensor elements 15 there is an insulating area 23 limiting the heat conduction between the elements. In practice the sensor elements 15 will be surrounded by insulating areas in order to thermally insulate them from each other. There is, however, an interesting embodiment within the scope of the invention in which a certain degree of heat conduction is permitted between the sensor elements 15. This may provide a filtering effect which, among other

things, suppresses the effect of unwanted local variations in temperature, i.e. reducing noise in the picture, without the use of extensive calculations.

Heat conduction between the elements may be chosen in many ways, e.g. by the physical dimensions and the shape of the insulating area, in choosing materials or by regulating the thickness of the electrically conducting layer 20 to let the heat be transported in it.

By the combination of an increase in the supplied heat and an allowed, controlled heat conduction between the sensor elements, the contrast may be maintained while smoothing the signal.

The insulating area may for example be made from SiO_2 or similar materials. A preferred embodiment from a production point of view would be that the insulating material is the same as, or compatible with, and is connected to, the thermal insulating layer 2 in figure 1. Choosing a material permitting an integrated production of the electronic circuits would also be beneficial in the manufacturing process.

Each sensor element 15 in the shown example has a corresponding heating element 21 producing a known amount of heat. In the shown example the heating elements 21 are controlled centrally by V_k and by using an electronic contact switch 24. It is, however, possible to provide the circuit with a separate control of each heating element to give a local control of the heat supply. A possible technique in achieving this is described below. The signal from the temperature sensor is addressed and controlled using an electronic contact switch 22, e.g. a double gate MosFET transistor.

In figure 5 a schematic sketch of the circuit of temperature sensors is shown. In the shown example the sensor is comprised by 512×512 sensor units 30 corresponding to one pixel in previously mentioned segmented picture, and which may be read separately or simultaneously in groups in a conventional manner. The physical size of the sensor may vary according to the fingerprint to be measured, but

starting at approximately $13 \times 13 \text{ mm}^2$. The pixel size must be sufficiently small to provide a picture of the structure of the fingerprint. Using the above mentioned dimensions the pixels will have the size of approximately $25.4 \times 25.4 \text{ } \mu\text{m}^2$. The
5 sensor is integrally made with common semiconductor technology, or possibly with polymer technology.

The row and column registers 31,32 may be provided as a part of the sensor or as a part of the system circuits, and may be used for collecting data from, and adresssing of, the
10 separate pixels.

The row and column registers 33,34 may be comprised by the sensor or by the system circuits and may be used in adresssing and controlling each of the heating elements.

To achieve a controlled, local heating of each sensor
15 element the pixel of interest may be adresssed repeatedly, possibly with a regulation of the access time. Thus a current is repeatedly sent through the electronic circuit of the sensor element. This will result in an accumulated heating of the sensor element which may be used in a partial
20 control of the heat supply in the chosen pixel.

The sensor is described above in relation to the measuring of fingerprints. It is, however, clear that it also may be used on other surfaces with a varying heat conductivity, heat capacity and/or thermic structures in the
25 surface. An example might for instans be measuring of structures in bank notes or similar structured surfaces. The sensor may also be used in inspecting inhomogeneities close to a surface, such as cracks and irregularities in materials as long as they affect the heat conduction of the
30 measured object.

C l a i m s

1. Method for measuring of patterns in an at least partially heat conducting surface, preferably a fingerprint, in which a number of sensor elements are brought in thermal contact with a substantial part of the surface (10) to be examined, and in which the temperature of each sensor element is measured,

c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that the sensor elements (15) are heated by a heat source,

that the temperature at each sensor element is measured one or more times, or continuously,

that the measured temperature(s) or changes in temperature in each sensor element (15) is/are compared with the supplied heat to provide a measure for the loss of heat from the sensor element (15) to the surface (10),

and that the loss of heat at each single sensor element (15) is collocated to provide a segmented picture of the surface based upon the variation in the loss of heat from the sensor elements to the surface (10).

2. Method according to claim 1,
c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that the measurement at each single sensor element (15) is controlled and read separately.

3. Method according to claim 1 or 2,
c h a r a c t e r i z e d in that the heating of each single sensor element (15) is controlled separately, e.g. by addressing the local temperature sensor in the element of interest, so that this behaves as a heat source.

4. Method according to one of the claims 1-3, characterized in that the sensor element (15) are partially thermally insulated using an insulating material (23), and that the heat conductivity of the insulating material (23) contributes in smoothing the differences in temperature between the sensor elements (15) to provide a filtering effect in the segmented picture.

5. Method according to one of the claims 1-4, characterized in that the contrast in the segmented picture is enhanced by increasing the heat supplied to the sensor in general or to each of the sensor elements (15) individually.

6. Method according to claim 5, in which the sensor elements are heated individually, characterized in that the heat supplied to each element is adjusted according to the temperature, or change in temperature, of the element.

7. Apparatus for measuring patterns in an at least partially heat conducting surface, preferably a fingerprint, comprising a plurality of sensor elements (15) adapted to thermal contact with a substantial part of said surface (10), and temperature sensors (15) adapted for measuring the temperature of each of the sensors, characterized in that it comprises one or more devices (21) adapted for heating said sensor elements and means for generating a signal corresponding to the heat conductivity at each of the sensor elements based upon the known supplied heat and the measured temperature(s) or change(s) in temperature, to establish an overall, segmented picture of the surface based upon the difference in heat loss at the sensor elements.

8. Apparatus according to claim 7, characterized in that it comprises a partially insulating material (23) between the sensor elements.

9. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims 7-8, characterized in that each sensor element (15) is provided with a separate heat source (21).

10. Apparatus according to one of the preceding claims 7-9, characterized in that each sensor element is adapted to at least partially control the heat supply.

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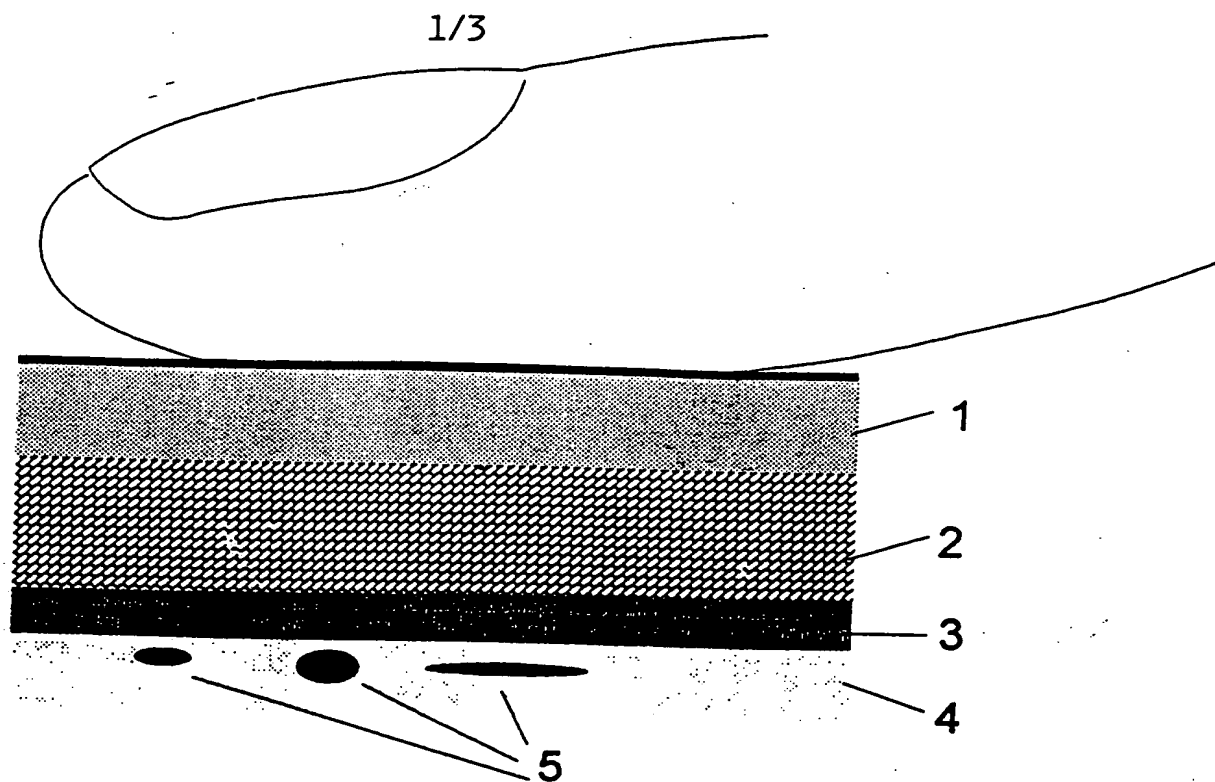


Fig. 1

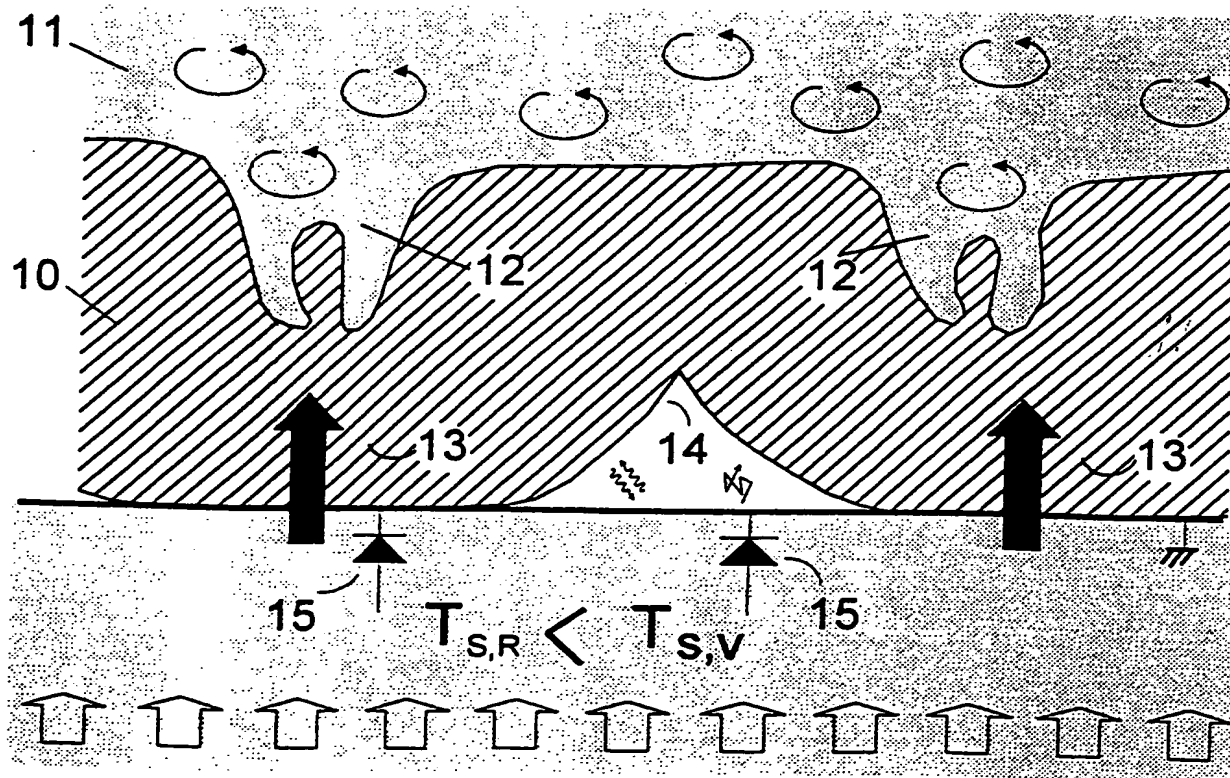


Fig. 2

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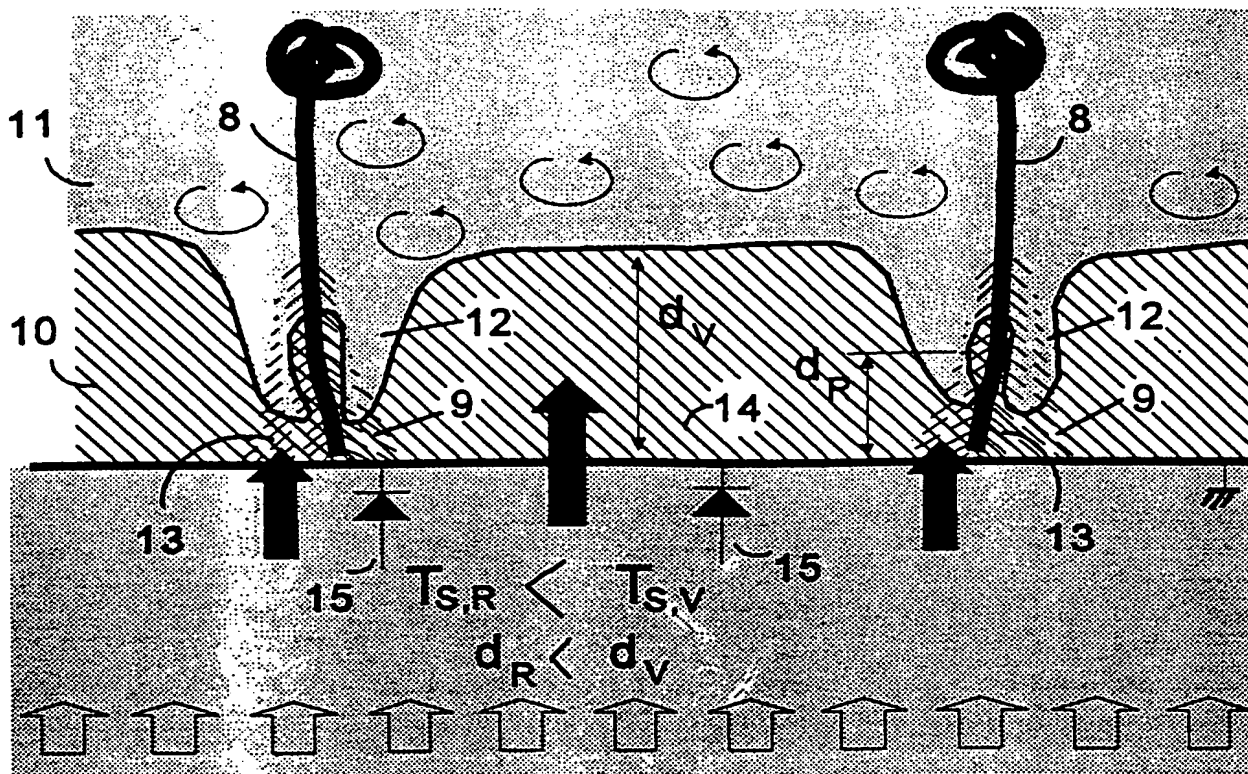


fig.3

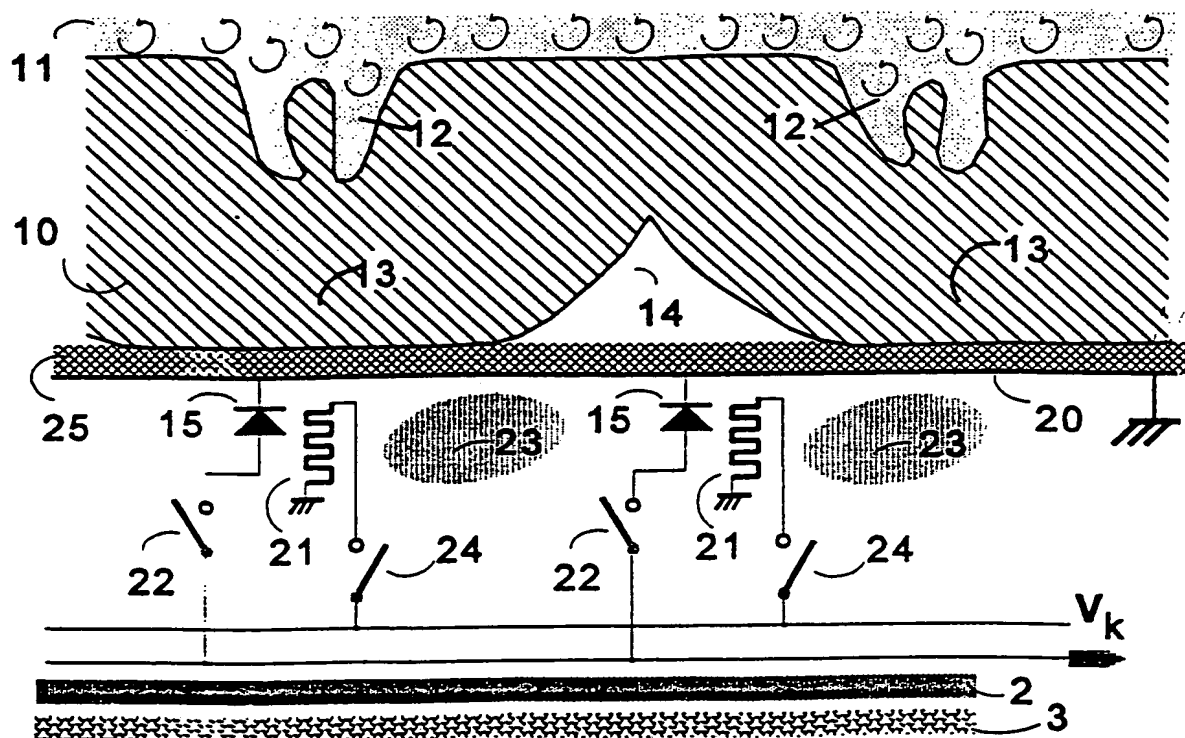


Fig.4
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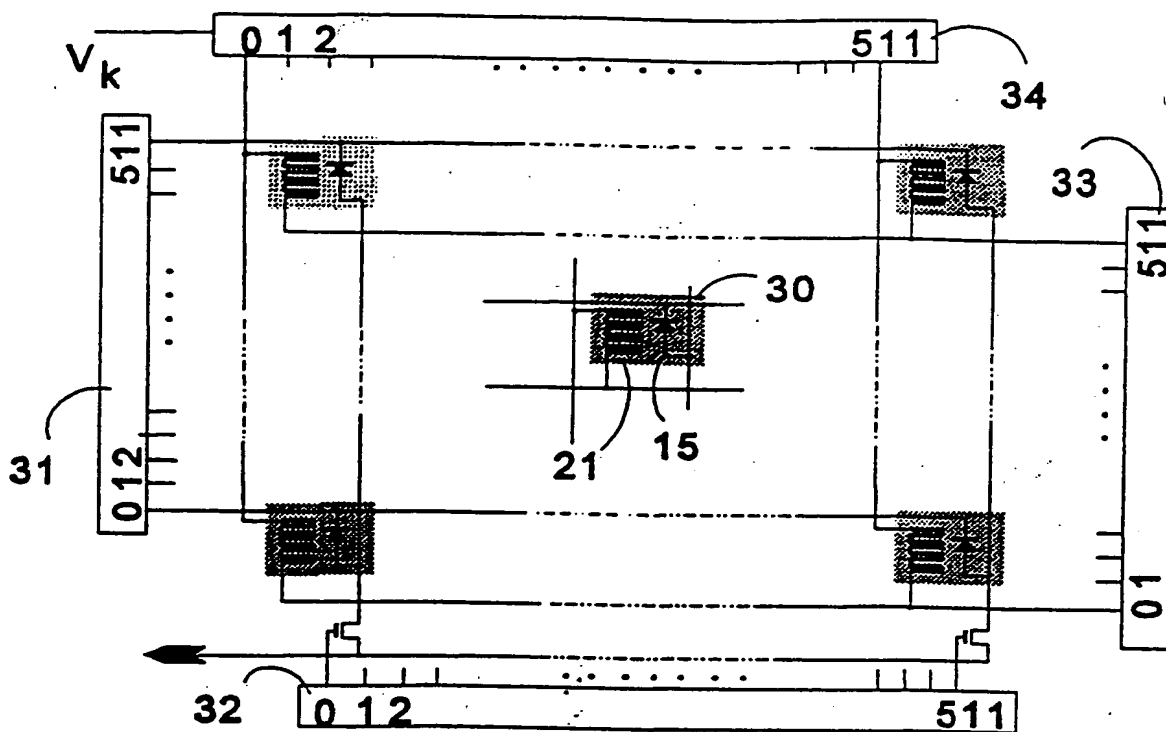


Fig.5

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/NO 96/00082

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC6: A61B 5/117

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC6: A61B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

SE,DK,FI,NO classes as above

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

WPI, CLAIMS

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 4429413 A (D.G. EDWARDS), 31 January 1984 (31.01.84), column 3, line 44 - column 4, line 17, figures 1-3 --	1-10
A	WO 8203286 A1 (LÖFBERG, BO), 30 Sept 1982 (30.09.82), page 9, line 14 - page 10, line 7 -- -----	1-10

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☒ See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

2 August 1996

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

01/07/96

International application No. -

PCT/NO 96/00082

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US-A- 4429413	31/01/84	EP-A,A,A 0071269 SE-T3- 0071269 JP-A- 58027277	09/02/83 17/02/83
WO-A1- 8203286	30/09/82	AU-A- 8273682 EP-A,A,B 0085680 SE-B,C- 425704 SE-A- 8101707 US-A- 4582985	06/10/82 17/08/83 25/10/82 19/09/82 15/04/86